

Executive decision

DUXBURY BAY

This is the final part of a look at the harbormaster's office in our continuing series about life on Duxbury Bay.

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MPG Newspapers

Life's a beach for the Duxbury Harbormaster's Department. Rain, shine, day or night, they are keeping an eye on the water and the beaches – it's their life.

Late at night, when many are nestled snug in their houses, Executive Officer Jake Emerson is dutifully watching over the waterways of Duxbury. At approximately quarter to 11 p.m. on a cool crisp Friday night, the reporter arrives to get a glimpse into the night shift of a harbormaster. Emerson, in gentleman-like fashion, offers his snugly warm float jacket. "It is going to get pretty windy out there," he says.

After he boards the boat he extends his hand to help his night shift shadow on board. He fires the engine on the inflatable boat, and with all lights a go, he carefully makes his way through the harbor to the open water.

He sits on the left side of the boat, facing the reporter with one hand on the wheel and an eye on the water. He steers through the boat infested harbor. As he guides the vessel toward the open water he explains the points he is checking that night as well as the regularly checked points.

The first point to be checked is Two Rock Anchorage, where a local man is spending the night on his boat. From there he patrolled the Powder Point beach area, then out toward the open harbor near Bug Light.

"When I go out here at night I am patrolling for fisherman, enforcing the rules and regulations and making sure everyone is safe," he says.

On an almost full-moon night the sky is clear, the water is barely moving and the stars are falling. As a meteor showers overhead, Emerson keeps things in order below.

He points to a red light out in the distance. "See that red light? That is a boat coming into harbor," he says.

Green lights are on the starboard (or right side of the boat, facing forward); red lights are on the port, or left side of the boat, he explains.

During the patrol the tide is rising, about half way to full tide. As many Duxbury boaters are aware the shallow waters of the harbor make it challenging for sailing and boating. Their is a designated channel that the boats must follow to go in and out of Duxbury harbor. The channel waters

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are much deeper and ensure boats a safe commute.

Emerson explained that the channels are marked by two different types of buoys. A red, pointy buoy is called a nun, a round, green buoy is called a can. The buoys in the channel also contain blinking lights to signal for night navigation.

Some buoys, however, are not equipped with lights, which can create accidents or near hits for those unfamiliar with Duxbury Bay. Some boaters even use spotlights or flashlights to guide them through the waters past the unlit buoys. A seasoned boater, or a harbormaster officer like Emerson, learns the tricky channels and waterways of shallow Duxbury Bay.

Emerson carefully scans the water for buoys as his boat clips along. With a quick turn to the left, he sails passed an unlit buoy. Seated in the bow of the boat with wind blown tears streaming down one's face, a sudden jerk of the boat can be alarming. The buoy whizzes by.

"You almost hit that buoy!" Nervous laughter emanates from the reporter after the boat has slowed down. "I thought I was going over."

nowhere close to hitting that one – but he has had some close calls before.

Emerson is a Duxbury native, graduating from Duxbury High School in 1998. He left Duxbury to study at the University of Richmond in Virginia, where he earned a degree in rhetoric and communications. He began working part-time in the harbormaster's department during his summers home from college before taking a full-time position.

Coincidentally, the same year

Emerson graduated from college the department made the endangered species officer position full time, allowing him the opportunity to remain in Duxbury. Three years after working as the endangered species officer, the executive officer position became available. Emerson applied for the position and became the acting officer in November 2005. He was sworn into the position this past March.

"I always liked law enforcement and public safety," Emerson says. "I started in the summers here and liked it so much I jumped at the opportunity to stay. I knew the town, what I would be doing and the people – I am very lucky."

As the executive officer, Emerson handles the office duties for the department. He is in charge of department scheduling and mooring waiting lists and permits. He says his day is split – at night he has time for schedules, paper work and waiting lists,

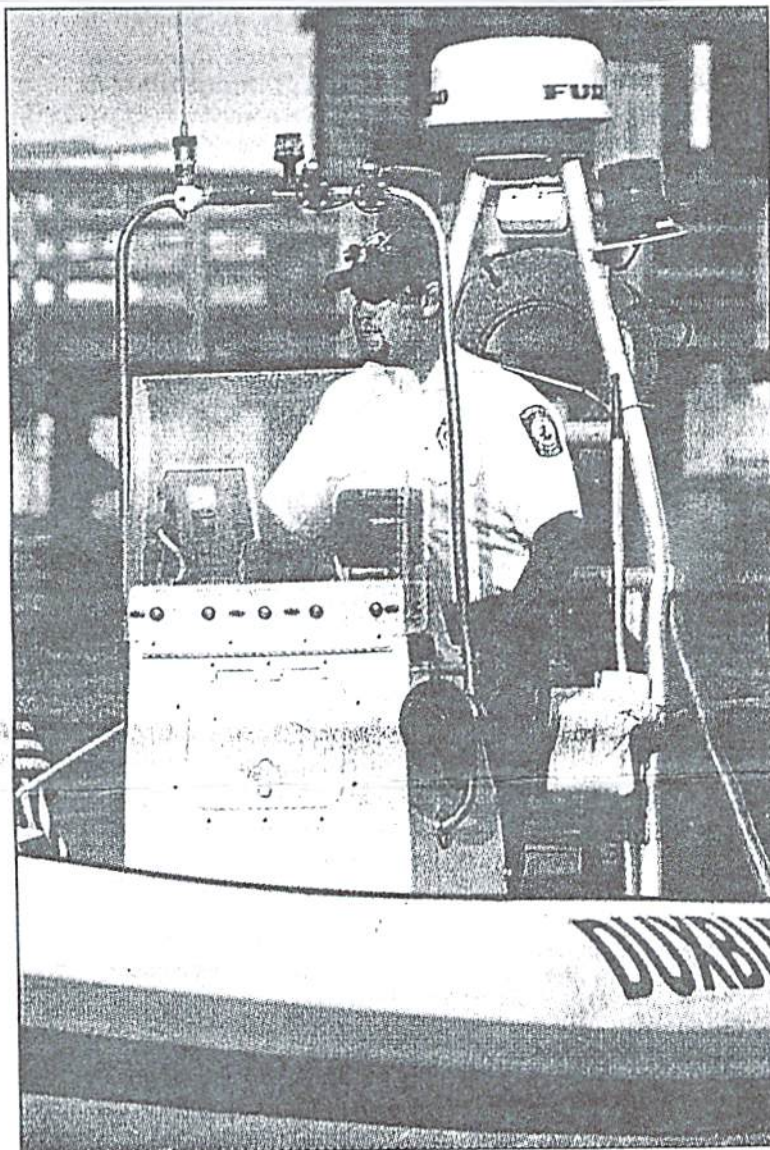
during the day he spends his time running to town hall with official documents.

"I am really happy with where I am," he says. "I am very fortunate that my family is around here. I get to see them a lot."

At 26, Emerson is content in his position. He has worked for the department for eight years, four of them full time. When speaking about Harbormaster Don Beers and his longevity at the department, he says he would love that kind of job security.

"I would be very fortunate to stay here as long as Don has," he says.

He has more than just a professional relationship with the town; it is where he grew up and the town he calls home. His light and comical personality makes his position as an officer carrying a gun that much less scary. As the executive officer he offers an open arm to the community.



STAFF PHOTO/WESLEY ENNIS

Executive Officer Jake Emerson pilots a harbor master department inflatable through the harbor.